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PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS UNIONS: SOME CANADIAN EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

After identifying several limitations in the literature on attitudes toward unions, this paper attempts to extend this area of research by examining data from a survey of over 700 randomly selected residents (including those not in the paid labour force) in the Canadian cities of Winnipeg and Edmonton. We find, among other things, that pro-union sentiments vary considerably depending on the dimension of union attitudes being considered. Instrumental beliefs about unions are prominent, but so too is the view that unions are overly powerful and contribute to inflation. Union members have more positive attitudes than do professional association members, non-unionized employees, and those not in the labour force. Non-unionized women in the labour force do not differ significantly from their male counterparts. Furthermore, there are few important differences between white-collar and blue-collar union members. We find a high degree of latent unionism among non-unionized labour force members: 40% would join a union if one existed in their workplace. Finally, union attitudes are better predictors of willingness to join than are demographic and socio-economic variables, although we can predict instrumental beliefs about unions with some degree of accuracy using these objective measures. The paper concludes with a discussion of the policy implications which our findings have for union organizers.

Public Attitudes Toward Unions: Some Canadian Evidence

Introduction

One of the more challenging problems with which social scientists have grappled is the relationship between attitudes and behaviour. The growing interest in workers' attitudes towards unions represents, in many respects, an exploration of this basic issue. As Michael Poole (1981:163) has recently argued, workers' perceptions of unions are a crucial ingredient in the development, growth, internal structures and policies of the trade union movement. A prominent theme in the growing body of literature on union attitudes is the close relationship between favourable views towards unions and union joining behaviour. Getman and his colleagues (1976:62) were able to predict with 79% accuracy voting behaviour in U.S. National Labour Relations Board elections simply on the basis of pre-campaign union attitudes (also see Schriesheim, 1978; Hamner and Smith, 1978). A second related theme in the literature concerns the instrumental orientation many workers hold towards unions. Accordingly, unions are perceived as an effective mechanism for gaining improvements in wages and working conditions. Furthermore, workers who are dissatisfied with the material aspects of their job are more likely to join a union (see Kochan, 1979; Getman et al., 1976; Farber and Saks, 1980; Gordon and Long, 1981; Poole, 1981; Le Louarn, 1979; Cook et al., 1978; Roberts et al., 1972; Maxey and Mohrman, 1980; Schriesheim, 1978).

A third theme which also touches upon union joining behaviour can be termed 'latent unionism'. Especially significant is Kochan's (1979:25) finding that

30% of the non-union respondents in the 1977 U.S. Quality of Employment Survey indicated they would vote for a union in their workplace were one available. Kochan further reports that no specific groups of employees were, in principle, strongly opposed to unionization provided it was warranted by poor job conditions (27). This nascent unionism may bode well for the labour movement. Yet little is known about the sources of latent union support, and whether it is still rising or has stabilized (Fiorito and Greer, 1982:1). Recently besieged by declining membership, the North American labour movement's survival largely depends on devising organizing strategies to tap this well of discontent and pro-unionism.[1]

There can be little doubt that the study of union attitudes contributes to a better understanding of patterns of union growth and development, the union joining process and the formulation of trade union policies. Yet there are at least two weaknesses in union attitude studies which restrict their explanatory power. First, most research has tended to be limited in scope, focusing on employees in a single organization, in only one sector of the economy, or on those who are already union members (Strauss, 1977; Smith and Hopkins, 1979). A broader, comparative perspective is required in order to gain insights into how union attitudes vary across industries, occupations, between members and non-members, and in different geographic regions. And second, the literature in the area mainly deals with American and, to a lesser extent, British employees. Given significant cross-national variations in industrial relations, it should be of some concern to Canadian scholars that, with only a few notable exceptions (Ponak and Haridas, 1979; Thompson and Moore, 1975), little is known about how Canadians view unions. The purpose of this paper, then, is to begin to rectify these limitations in the literature by examining perceptions of unions within a cross-section of the Canadian public. Instead of focusing on a specific

occupational group or organization as in most previous studies, we utilize random samples of the adult populations in the cities of Winnipeg and Edmonton. While not permitting the same generalizations as a national sample, these city samples nonetheless offer useful insights regarding union beliefs within large Canadian urban centres.

Previous Research

Since the late 1930s, public opinion polls in the U.S. consistently have shown that the large majority of citizens approves of the principle of unionism and the right of employees to join a union (Bok and Dunlop, 1970:12).[2] Interestingly, this support for unionism does not vary significantly according to demographic, occupational or socio-economic background characteristics. Similarly, Kochan (1979:23) found widespread support for what he calls the 'big labour image', which portrays unions as large, powerful and effective organizations. An equally prominent orientation, held by over 80% of the respondents in his national sample, views unions as improving wages and job security for members and protecting them from unfair management practices (24). This instrumental view of unions was most pronounced among those who were union members, had higher education, and lived in the south. White-collar workers, especially managers, workers in the north-central region, and those in manufacturing, transportation and utilities held less instrumental beliefs. And as mentioned above, there were no identifiable groups who opposed joining a union on ideological grounds.

It is reasonable to expect attitudes to differ along sex lines, considering the lower unionization rates among women. By 1980 in Canada, 23.9% of women workers were unionized compared to 38% of male workers (Labour Canada, 1983:13). Traditional stereotypes portray female workers as less interested in unions on

the assumption that women's primary attachment is to the wife-mother role. Women are therefore thought to view their jobs as temporary which, in turn, reduces the tangible advantages of unionization (Fiorito and Dauffenbach, 1982:476). There is now mounting evidence to challenge this view. For one thing, between 1966 and 1976 Canadian women have been joining unions at four times the male rate (White, 1980:27). Some female unionists are showing signs of increasing militancy and are taking a more active part in union affairs (Chaison and Andiappan, 1982:765). Both these observations help to dispel the myth of female complacency regarding collective bargaining. Indeed, several researchers have concluded that women may be more predisposed to joining a union than are men because of their poor economic rewards and powerlessness within work organizations (Kochan, 1979; Marchak, 1974; Antos, Chandler and Mellow, 1980; Farber and Saks, 1980). Whether this finds expression in more positive union attitudes among women is still open to speculation. However, one study did find that male nurses and teachers viewed collective bargaining more favourably than did their female co-workers (Alutto and Belasco, 1974:222).

According to Smith and Hopkins (1979:491), the issue of whether union members and non-members hold different attitudes towards unionism is largely unresolved. The comment equally applies to professional association members and individuals not currently in the labour force. However, the restricted focus in much of the union attitude research on union members makes systematic comparisons among these groups difficult. The little available evidence does suggest that union members view unions more favourably than non-members. This is mainly a consequence of union members' initial predisposition to unions and the fact that belonging to a union tends to engender pro-union views (Smith and Hopkins, 1979; Kochan, 1979; Bok and Dunlop, 1970:19).[3]

Shifting our focus to professionals, there is a dirth of information on how their union attitudes may vary from those of unionists or unorganized non-professionals. Professional associations have long been viewed as essentially different from unions: they are middle class, status-oriented bodies which often represent large numbers of self-employed professionals (Johnson, 1972; Prandy, 1965). Indeed, the socialization of professional values typically involves an emphasis on individualism and opposition to collective bargaining (Stern and Murphy, 1980). But for those professionals in education, community and social services, and health care who face more routinized and bureaucratic working conditions, unionization is an increasingly attractive option (Oppenheimer, 1973). Not surprisingly, a number of recent union attitude studies examine this new type of unionized professional (Maxey and Mohrman, 1980; Le Louarn, 1979; Alutto and Belasco, 1974). Staunch anti-unionism still exists within law, accounting, medicine and other traditional centres of professional power. But at the same time, unionized professionals such as nurses and teachers are becoming increasingly militant.

A related comparison is between blue-collar and white-collar employees. Historically, this basic occupational division has explained much of the difference between unions and professional associations. Analysts have tended to portray white-collar workers as less union-oriented than their blue-collar counterparts. Foremost among the reasons for this is the potential for collective political action attributed to the industrial working class by Marx. In contrast, the middle class position of white-collar workers and the status trappings of their jobs have been interpreted as underlying their more individualistic approach to bargaining.

Critics of this position argue that it is inaccurate to polarize white- and blue-collar workers, their unions, and their images of society into two distinct

types (Bain et al., 1973:68; 148). To be sure, rapid union membership gains over the past decade among white-collar, largely female, employees - that segment of the work force long considered most resistant to unionization - supports this criticism.[4] Earlier suggestions that white-collar and manual workers possess a different "industrial ethos" (Sykes, 1965:307) must be reconsidered in light of these recent membership trends. Unionization has been the response of numerous white-collar groups to deteriorations in their socio-economic standing and working conditions (Carter, 1979; Crompton, 1979). This may well signal a convergence of union attitudes among white- and blue-collar workers (Smith and Hopkins, 1979:485; Cook et al., 1978). Thus, an important topic for research is the extent to which occupation constitutes a major source of variation in the orientations of union members towards collective bargaining (cf. Fiorito and Dauffenbach, 1982).

A final point of concern is the role of attitudes in the union joining process. Despite the centrality of the topic to industrial relations, there is little consensus in the literature on why workers join unions (Walker and Lawler, 1979:32; Gordon and Long, 1981:306). Nonetheless, Le Louarn (1979) has attempted to present the underlying logic of much of this research using the following causal model: attitudes toward unions -- intent to vote -- actual vote -- union membership. In other words, attitudes and intent are used to predict behaviour. Getman et al.'s (1976) study of the effects of pre-election campaigns on employee voting in NLRB elections has advanced this thesis. These researchers argue that intent, a powerful and general predictor of vote ($r = .73$), is itself a function of attitudes towards unions as well as job satisfaction. The high correlations among all three measures led Getman et al. (1976:64) to conclude that regardless of socio-demographic characteristics, occupation or industry of employment, or place of residence, individuals "acted on their attitudes."

But this thesis begs the question: what gives rise to pro-union attitudes? No convincing answer can be found in the literature. It is widely assumed that dissatisfaction with the economic aspects of employment predispose workers to unionism (Getman et al., 1976; Gordon and Long, 1981; Schriescheim, 1978; Husaini and Geschwender, 1968; Le Louarn, 1979; Hamner and Smith, 1978). Other than reporting consistently strong correlations between measures of extrinsic job satisfaction and support for unionism, researchers comment little on the exact nature of this relationship. If an instrumental orientation seems predominant among workers favourable to unionism, then it would be valuable to thoroughly examine the correlates of this orientation (Fiorito and Greer, 1982:12; Le Louarn, 1979:82).

Research Questions

We will be guided in our analysis by five research questions which highlight key issues in the above literature. First, what is the nature of beliefs about unions within the adult population? Second, given the lower rate of unionization among women, are they less pro-union in their attitudes than men? Third, to what extent are there variations in union orientations between union members, professional association members, employees who are not members of either type of organization, and individuals not in the labour force? Fourth, in light of the long-standing scholarly debate over the differences between white - and blue-collar workers, do these two groups of union members exhibit divergent perceptions of unions? And fifth, consistent with the growing research interest in determinants of union joining, what attitudinal, personal and structural characteristics are associated with latent support for union membership among non-unionists?

Data and Measurement

These research questions were addressed with survey data collected in the western Canadian cities of Winnipeg and Edmonton. The 1981 Edmonton Area Study was the fifth in an annual series administered and supported by the Population Research Laboratory and the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta. A Winnipeg Area Study was simultaneously undertaken by members of the Sociology Departments of the Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg. The two studies used identical questionnaires in one-hour long structured interviews with residents of these cities in February of 1981. In both communities, up-to-date municipal records were used to generate simple random samples of household addresses. One adult (18 years of age or older) was to be interviewed in each household, and repeated callbacks were attempted if no contact could be made with members of the sampled household. The final samples of 400 in Edmonton and 336 in Winnipeg (response rates of 75% and 74% respectively) were made up of approximately 69% labour force members, 17% housewives, 4% students and 10% retirees. Comparisons with census data showed the samples to be representative of the cities from which they were taken in important demographic aspects (Kinzel, 1981; Currie and Thacker, 1982). The two samples are combined in the following analyses and, where appropriate, a binary variable for city of residence is used to check for city differences. A more detailed analysis and discussion of community differences in attitudes toward unions appears in a companion paper (Krahn and Lowe, 1982).

A set of 14 Likert-style attitudinal statements about unions in general, the benefits they provide for workers, their role in contemporary society, and the amount of power they hold were administered by interviewers to sample members. Respondents answered using a 7-point "strongly disagree - strongly agree" response scale. Eleven of the items were selected from the Uphoff and

Dunnette (1956) 'unionism in general' scale. Three were taken from the survey instrument used in the 1977 York University "Social Change in Canada" study.[5] Minor wording changes were made in some of the Uphoff-Dunnette items to more accurately reflect contemporary Canadian industrial relations and to make the items applicable to the general population.

Findings

i) The Nature of Union Attitudes:

A useful starting point for our discussion is Table 1, which reports the percentage of the combined Winnipeg-Edmonton samples in agreement with the fourteen attitudinal statements. We first note that the level of support for these beliefs varies greatly. The greatest agreement (91.9%) was elicited by a statement about the right of workers to refuse to work in unsafe conditions. Almost all of the 1977 York University national sample (95.8%) also agreed with this statement.[6] The universal concern over this issue suggests strong support for initiatives by the labour movement to lobby for improved occupational health and safety standards.

Looking at other pro-labour sentiments, we find considerable agreement (71%) with the proposal for worker representatives on boards of directors. This is almost identical to the support this issue received (72.2%) in the York national sample. Slightly more than one half of our respondents also agreed that wages and working conditions in an organization are better when all employees belong to a union (55.6%) and, further, that non-union employers generally pay less than do unionized establishments (51.9%). Respondents were fairly evenly split on support for laws against strike breaking (49.3% agreement). In contrast, 58.2% of the 1977 York national sample agreed with this statement. On the more general issue of the ability of unions to fight the

TABLE 1: Attitudes toward unions by sex, total sample.

Attitude Statement	Percent Agreement[1] Women	Men	Total
1. Workers should have the right to refuse to work in conditions which they consider to be unsafe.	92.4	91.2	91.9
2. Employees should have representatives on the board of directors of the organization for which they work.	72.6	68.8	71.0
3. During a strike, management should be prohibited by law from hiring workers to take the place of strikers.	46.4	52.9	49.3
4. The high wage demands of unions contribute directly to inflation.	65.9	59.8	63.2
5. We need more laws to limit the power of unions.	58.7	55.2	57.2
6. Unions impose too many restrictions on employers.	47.6	53.4	50.3
7. Labour unions should be regulated to a greater extent by the government.	43.0	45.6	44.2
8. Employees of an organization have better wages and working conditions when all of them belong to a union.	54.2	57.4	55.6
9. A non-union employee generally pays lower wages than a unionized employer.	46.4 [3]	58.6	51.9
10. The selfishness of employers can be fought only by strong unions.	40.7 [3]	50.4	45.1

Table 1 (cont'd)

Attitude Statement	Percent Agreement[1] Women	Men	Total
11. If the majority of workers in a workplace vote to have a union, the others should be required to join.	26.7 [3]	44.1	34.5
12. Workers should have to join a union in order to hold a job.	9.6 [2]	15.3	12.2
13. The growth of unions has made our democracy stronger.	34.3 [3]	43.2	38.4
14. Most unions gain their membership by forcing workers to join through threats and intimidation.	24.0	26.7	25.1

1. Respondents answered on a scale of "strongly disagree (1) to (7) strongly agree". Scores of 5 to 7 are taken to represent "agreement" in this table. An average of about 8% of the total sample (405 women and 331 men) did not respond to each of these items, except for item 14 which had 16% non-response. Percentages reported are based on the total sample (inclusive of respondents who did not answer a question).
2. Difference between proportions (two-tailed test) is statistically significant ($p < .05$).
3. Difference between proportions (two-tailed test) is statistically significant ($p < .01$).

selfishness of employers, agreement among our respondents was somewhat lower (45.1%).

Finally, the lack of agreement with the view that unions use threats and intimidation to recruit members (25.1%) may be seen as a rejection of this negative stereotype. In addition, those who disagree with this distorted stereotype may feel that today's union recruits, many of whom are well educated white-collar workers, make up their own minds on whether or not to join. However, the fact that 16% of respondents had no opinion on this issue suggests that many of the sample members may have had little first-hand experience with union organizing campaigns.

Standing in contrast to these pro-labour views is the fairly widespread support for a series of items which portray unions in a negative light. Considerably more than half of all respondents agreed that union wage demands fuel inflation (63.2%), and that more laws are needed to limit the power of unions (57.2%). Our sample was almost evenly split on whether or not unions impose too many restrictions on employers. And just over 44% felt that unions should be better regulated by government. The item receiving the lowest level of agreement (12.2%) stipulates that union membership should be required in order to hold a job. This is not surprising given the prevalence of the Rand formula - requiring only that an individual pay union dues as a condition of employment - as the basis for union security in Canada. On the assumption that the majority of employees in a workplace voted to unionize, a larger number of respondents (34.5%) felt that other workers should also be required to join.

ii) Sex Differences in Attitudes:

Table 1 also reports agreement levels for males and females. While support for most of these positive and negative statements about unions varies to some degree along sex lines, on only 5 of the 14 items is the difference

statistically significant. In short, women seem less concerned than men about issues of union security. They are also less likely to agree that unions obtain better wages for members, effectively fight employer selfishness and, finally, contribute to democracy. These differences may reflect lower female unionization levels and sex differences in work experiences. In addition, our sample contains women in the labour force as well as those working in their homes. We control for this factor in a later analysis, but believe it is informative to present here a sample estimate of the union attitudes of the total adult population of these two cities.

iii) The Multi-dimensionality of Attitudes:

An examination of the 14 items in Table 1 suggests that it may be possible to identify several fairly discrete clusters of union attitudes. Table 2 presents the results of such an attempt at data reduction. A series of exploratory factor analyses (results not shown) indicated that 3 distinct and reliable indices could be constructed.[7] A 'big labour' index, comprised of the average of responses to items 4 through 7 in Table 1, pictures unions as too powerful, creating negative effects, and requiring government control. A 'business unionism' index, the average of items 8 through 10 in Table 1, presents the instrumental view that unions provide material benefits for members. Both scales have good inter-item reliability, with alphas of .76 and .68 respectively. A third index, labelled 'required union membership', was created by averaging items 11 and 12 in Table 1 which were moderately correlated ($r = .45$). In addition, there are four single item measures each tapping a distinctive attitudinal dimension: the right to refuse unsafe working conditions, prohibiting the hiring of strike-breakers, worker representation on boards of directors, and unions fostering democracy. We dropped the item about threats and intimidation because of its high rate of non-response.

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The inter-correlations among the seven indices and items are of the size and direction we would expect to find, given their content (Table 2). The big labour index is negatively correlated with all other measures, consistent with it being a measure of anti-unionism. Those holding a big labour orientation especially disagree with statements about unions fostering democracy ($r = -.409$), limits on hiring strike-breakers ($r = -.339$), and union security provisions ($r = -.337$). As well, they are less likely to hold the more positive instrumental view of unions ($r = -.256$). The business unionism index is most highly correlated with two statements about the advantages and rights of labour: unions foster democracy ($r = .465$) and requiring union membership ($r = .452$). In turn, these items have a moderately strong correlation ($r = .454$). Item 4 on the right to refuse unsafe working conditions shows weak correlations with the other measures, a reflection of the near unanimity expressed on this issue. With this one exception, the moderate size of the correlation coefficients in Table 2 demonstrate that these various beliefs and opinions are probably all part of a more general but multi-dimensional attitude toward unions.

iv) Sub-group Comparisons:

In Table 3 we provide a breakdown of mean responses to the seven attitudinal measures according to union or professional association membership and labour force status. This extends the analysis of attitudes found in previous research in two respects. First, we distinguish between membership in unions and professional associations, rather than grouping the latter into a blanket 'non-union' category. Second, we classify the remainder of the sample according to whether or not they are in the paid labour force.[8] It is our view that the four categories in Table 3 are a meaningful way of examing the variations in union attitudes across major sub-groups in the population. We note that the sub-group sizes, ranging from 134 to 230, facilitate such an analysis.

TABLE 2: Inter-correlations among attitude items and indices, total sample.[1]

	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	
	-.256	-.337	-.074	-.339	-.107	-.409	(1)
		.452	.134	.352	.311	.465	(2)
(1) Big labour index			.014	.277	.177	.454	(3)
(2) Business unionism index							
(3) Required union membership index				.234	.263	.177	(4)
(4) Right to refuse unsafe work							
(5) Prohibit the hiring of strike-breakers					.307	.339	(5)
(6) Workers on boards of directors							
(7) Unions foster democracy						.278	(6)

1. Sample sizes range from 631 to 692 for these correlation coefficients, because of different amounts of missing data for different questions.

TABLE 3: Average scores[1] on attitude items and indices by union membership and labour force status.

	Union members	Professional association members	Non-members in the labour force	Non-members not in the labour force
Big labour index[3]	4.06	4.82	4.97	4.99
Business unionism index[3]	5.32	4.49	4.46	4.54
Required union membership index[3]	3.68	2.72	2.66	2.91
Right to refuse unsafe work	6.56	6.30	6.40	6.49
Prohibit the hiring of strike-breakers[3]	5.60	4.40	4.18	4.63
Workers on boards of directors[2]	5.80	5.23	5.43	5.35
Unions foster democracy[3]	4.59	4.13	3.86	3.87
(Approximate group size)	(144)	(134)	(230)	(186)

1. Average of "strongly disagree (1) - (7) strongly agree" numeric responses for each attitude item. Higher averages indicate greater agreement with the statement.

2. Differences between means are statistically significant (p .05).

3. Differences between means are statistically significant (p .001).

We can see from the table that there are statistically significant differences in the union attitudes of the four groups on all but one of the measures. As noted above, the relative lack of variation on the right to refuse unsafe work reflects a consensus on the issue. Consistent with previous research, we find that union members hold the most positive views about unions and, conversely, are least supportive of the big labour image. However, in both the big labour and the business unionism indices there is no large and clear dichotomy apparent between pro- and anti-union groups. Rather, there are different levels of agreement across the four groups, given that all means for the two indices fall above the central point on the seven-point "strongly disagree - strongly agree" scale. Exploring further inter-group variations in Table 3, it is noteworthy that the greatest differences occur between union members and all others. Indeed, there is remarkably little attitudinal variation among the three non-union groups. A one-way analysis of variance for the three non-union groups (results not displayed) revealed non-significant differences for each of the seven items and indices.

v) Attitudes of White- and Blue-Collar Union Members:

When the union members in the sample are divided along occupational lines, as in Table 4, some interesting findings emerge. First of all, white- and blue-collar union members are significantly different on only two of the attitudinal dimensions. White-collar members are more prone to the big labour view of unions and less supportive of strong union security provisions than are their blue-collar comparison group. However, compared to other non-unionized labour force members, they are still relatively pro-labour in their attitudes. Both professional association members and non-unionized employees are less pro-labour than are white-collar unionists (comparing columns 2 and 3 in Table 3 with column 1 in Table 4). A central question in the literature reviewed

TABLE 4: Union members' average scores[1] on attitude items and indices by white-collar/blue-collar occupation.

	White-Collar union members	Blue-Collar union members
Big labour index	4.33 [2]	3.78
Business unionism index	5.26	5.37
Required union membership index	3.12 [3]	4.26
Right to refuse unsafe work	6.58	6.53
Prohibit the hiring of strike-breakers	5.49	5.71
Workers on boards of directors	5.79	5.81
Unions foster democracy	4.61	4.58
(Approximate group size)	(74)	(70)

1. Average of the "strongly disagree (1) - (7) strongly agree" numeric responses for each attitude item. Higher averages indicate greater agreement with the statement.

2. Difference between means is statistically significant (p .05).

3. Difference between means is statistically significant (p .001).

earlier is whether white- and blue-collar union members share an instrumental orientation toward collective bargaining. According to Table 4, there is no significant difference in this respect: regardless of their collar colour, union members share a business unionism perspective.

vi) Predicting Willingness to Join Among Non-Union Employees:

The next stage in our analysis focused on attitudes and willingness to join within the non-unionized labour force. A full 39% of the 242 respondents in this group of potential union members reported that they would join a union if one existed in their workplace or profession. This is a remarkable display of latent unionism. Comparing city samples, we find 35% willing to join in Edmonton and 45% in Winnipeg, but this difference is not significant. If we exclude the 50 managers and professionals in this group, we find 40% willing to join (36% in Edmonton and 47% in Winnipeg).

Table 5 presents the inter-correlations for the seven attitudinal measures as well as willingness to join a union if one was available. Looking only at the attitudinal intercorrelations, we can see very similar patterns to those reported in Table 2. Of central interest in Table 5 is the way in which attitudes correlate with the predisposition to join a union. Specifically, four of the attitudinal dimensions show moderately strong correlations in this respect: a negative correlation of -.368 with the big labour index, and positive correlations in the magnitude of .368 to .43 for business unionism, required union membership and unions foster democracy. Three other issues - the right to refuse unsafe work, controls on strike breaking and workers on boards of directors - are only weakly correlated with propensity to join. When the 50 professionals and managers contained in this sub-sample are dropped, on the assumption they are not likely union membership candidates, the results are not appreciably changed.

TABLE 5: Inter-correlations among union attitudes: non-unionized labour force members.[1]

	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	
	-.206	-.360	-.012	-.369	-.053	-.419	-.368	(1)
		.437	.070	.330	.257	.427	.368	(2)
(1) Big labour index			-.019	.180	.097	.441	.430	(3)
(2) Business unionism index								
(3) Required union membership index				.194	.242	.075	.014	(4)
(4) Right to refuse unsafe work								
(5) Prohibit the hiring of strike-breakers					.178	.326	.151	(5)
(6) Workers on boards of directors								
(7) Unions foster democracy						.243	.117	(6)
(8) Would join a union (yes = 1, no = 0)							.379	(7)

1. Sample size varies from cell to cell (between 215 and 238) due to different amounts of missing data for these items and indices. With samples of this size, correlations of .11 or larger (in absolute value) are statistically significant at the .05 level.

These findings have relevant policy implications for unions. It appears that union organizing campaigns should emphasize basic "bread and butter" issues, union security, as well as the overall place of unionism in a democratic society. Certainly the specific grievances of target groups in membership drives play a prominent role in campaign publicity. But additional communication dealing with these three general concerns may also positively influence workers' union-joining behaviour.

The moderate correlations among union attitudes (Table 5) raise the question of which union attitudes might be most influential in the decision to join. Table 6 represents an attempt to address this issue. Creating a sub-sample (by excluding managers and professionals) of only those non-union employees who are potentially organizable, we performed a multiple regression analysis using the seven attitudinal measures as predictors of willingness to join a union.

The first observation is that, quite in line with previous studies (Getman et al., 1976; Le Louarn, 1979) we are able to account for a sizeable proportion of the variation (32%) in willingness to join a union. But examining the standardized regression coefficients, it is plain that only three of the variables - the required membership, business unionism, and big labour indices - have any significant predictive value. Again, the instrumentalism thesis advanced in much of the literature receives a moderate level of support, with a standardized regression coefficient of .227. The required union membership index has a fractionally larger coefficient (Beta = .27). And, as expected, the big labour index is negatively associated with willingness to join, but only weakly (Beta = -.153). Although not reported in the table, our results changed very little when a wide range of demographic and social-structural variables were introduced into the regression equation.[9] The attitude items and indices

TABLE 6: Attitudinal predictors of willingness to join a union: multiple regression equation for non-unionized labour force members.[1]

Independent variable	Beta	b	st. error	F
Required union membership index [2]	.270	.090	.026	11.78
Business unionism index [2]	.227	.078	.027	8.29
Big labour index [2]	-.153	-.062	.031	3.94
Unions foster democracy	.130	.036	.023	2.45
Workers on boards of directors	.059	.018	.021	0.71
Prohibit hiring of strike-breakers	.038	.009	.017	0.27
Right to refuse unsafe work	-.005	-.002	.029	0.01
(Intercept)		-.037		

N = 163 Adjusted R^2 = .321

1. Responents who are either professionals or managers are not included in this analysis.

2. Coefficient is statistically significant (p .05).

of importance in Table 6 remained so and other variables did not have significant net effects. This should not come as a surprise for, as a general rule, behavioural intentions are more readily predicted from attitudes than from more objective factors.

Such a conclusion raises the more fundamental problem of which objective factors initially shaped these attitudes. In a rather exploratory fashion we address this question by treating as dependent variables the three attitude indices which have significant effects on willingness to join (Table 6). They were examined in multiple regression analyses which used the many objective factors introduced earlier (see footnote 9) as independent variables. Reduced-form equations containing only independent variables with significant net effects are displayed in Table 7. Essentially, this type of analysis should help us determine who in the non-unionized labour force holds the most positive attitudes toward unions.

We are only able to account for 6.5% and 7.8% of the variation respectively in the required union membership and big labour indices. We fare better with the business unionism index, where six independent variables explain 19.2% of the variance. The major conclusion to emerge, then, is that only in terms of instrumental attitudes are we able to predict with any degree of precision which types of individuals are likely to be pro- or anti-union. This is somewhat disappointing if our only goal is to be able to find strong and systematic patterns of association between demographic and structural factors, and individuals' attitudes. But for the union organizer, the low levels of explained variance suggest that there are few groups of non-unionized workers whose attitudes are so clearly anti-union as to completely rule out organizing efforts. Of particular interest is the fact that gender is not a significant predictor of those union attitudes, or of the reported willingness to join a

TABLE 7: Correlates of union attitudes: reduced-form multiple regression equations for non-unionized labour force members.[1]

Dependent variables: I. Required union membership index
II. Business unionism index
III. Big labour index

Independent variable		Beta	b	st. error	F	r
I.	Financially "worse off" than one year ago	.226	.476	.153	9.72	.227
	Employed in service industry	.154	.496	.233	4.52	.156
	N = 179 Intercept		1.728	Adjusted	R^2 = .065	
II.	Employed in service industry	.219	.718	.226	10.11	.236
	Political affiliation = PC	-.197	-.593	.211	7.92	-.239
	Experienced employment problems in past year	.176	.568	.255	6.40	.163
	Education (years)	-.169	-.096	.039	6.00	-.196
	City of residence (Edmonton = 1)	-.160	-.476	.210	5.16	-.203
	Spouse is a professional	-.160	-.984	.425	5.36	-.170
	N = 172 Intercept		5.811	Adjusted	R^2 = .192	
III.	Political affiliation = NDP	-.191	-.660	.249	7.01	-.171
	Clerical occupation	.169	.412	.177	5.39	.148
	Age (years)	.152	.013	.006	4.51	.176
	Financially "worse off" than one year ago[2]	-.129	-.224	.125	3.20	-.104
	N = 182 Intercept		4.733	Adjusted	R^2 = .078	

1. The original list of predictor variables is described in footnote 9. Only variables which had significant net effects (p .05) were retained. The equations were then recalculated with other variables omitted in order to increase sample sizes. Respondents who are either professionals or managers are not included in this analysis.

2. Significance level (p .10); all other coefficients are significant at the .05 level

union. When comparing men and women within the non-unionized paid labour force, we find no evidence supporting the stereotype of female disinterest in unions.[10]

Nevertheless, we can identify a few correlates of positive and negative union attitudes among non-members in the labour force. Controlling on other variables in the equation, we find that individuals employed in the service industry and those who have experienced employment problems in the past year are more likely to support the business unionism view. Alternatively, those who report Progressive Conservative as their political affiliation, have a higher than average education, live in Edmonton as opposed to Winnipeg, and have a spouse who is a professional are less likely to agree that unions improve their members' financial positions. A worker's social environment, whether it be the family or the community, does appear to have a small effect on her or his union attitudes.

We have noted that much of the previous research in this area underlines the importance of job dissatisfaction, particularly regarding material rewards. In some respects, our question dealing with financial difficulties broadly taps this economic dimension of dissatisfaction. While we do find significant zero-order correlations between several global job satisfaction measures and instrumental attitudes, these drop out of the picture after controlling for our measure of employment problems. Thus, we end up corroborating other researchers' conclusions about the way job dissatisfaction underlies favourable predispositions toward unions. Finally, if we consider all equations in Table 7, we discover that three factors have significant net effects on more than one dependent variable. Employment in the service industry (more pro-labour), being financially worse off than a year ago (more pro-labour), and political affiliation may, therefore, have a more generalized effect in shaping the views of non-union workers towards the labour movement.

Summary and Conclusions

The central thrust of this paper has been to examine attitudes towards unions in the adult population of two Canadian cities. Basically, we found that pro-union sentiments varied considerably according to which aspect of unionism was being examined. Overwhelming support was registered on two issues: the right of workers to refuse to work in unsafe conditions, and worker representation on boards of directors. Just over half of our respondents held strong instrumental beliefs, recognizing the collective bargaining gains of unions. Yet we also found a slightly higher percentage voicing support for the big labour image of unions. Central to this more negative view of unions is the common belief that unions help cause inflation. Our decision to use seven attitudinal measures rather than a single index lends weight to previous arguments that perceptions of unions are multi-dimensional and complex (Kochan, 1979; Uphoff and Dunnette, 1956; Gordon and Long, 1981). In fact, it is possible for individuals to have both positive and negative images and beliefs about the labour movement depending on the specific issue at stake.

Recapping our sub-group comparisons, we found that women were less in agreement than men with statements about business unionism, unions contributing to democracy, and the importance of union security. Subsequent analysis of a sub-sample of non-unionized labour force members showed that women and men did not differ significantly in their union attitudes. When we compared union members with members of professional associations, non-union employees, as well as individuals not in the labour force, we could not detect strong anti-union sentiments within any of these groups. Not surprisingly, the most positive view of unions was expressed by union members. Significant differences did not exist between the other three groups. Comparing only white- and blue-collar union members, we discovered that instrumentalism was a dominant orientation in both

groups. White-collar unionists did, however, tend to be more supportive of the big labour image.

Another focal point of our analysis concerned the willingness to join a union. Of paramount interest is the substantial level of latent unionism we found: 40% of the non-union employees surveyed in Winnipeg and Edmonton (managers and professionals excluded) said they would join a union if one existed in their workplace. By comparison, only 30% of American workers have indicated similar intentions (Kochan, 1979). One might hypothesize that Canada's higher level of unionization creates a more conducive climate for workers to consider collective bargaining as a viable option. This issue certainly deserves further investigation in a cross-national study of the union joining process.

Consistent with previous research, we were able to account for 32% of the variation in non-unionized employees' willingness to join with union attitudes alone. The strongest attitudinal predictors were business unionism, or an instrumental view of unions, as well as beliefs about required union membership. When a battery of more objective variables were added to the attitude measures, we could not improve our predictive ability. Attitudes remained the primary determinant of willingness to join. The same objective measures were used to determine who within the sample was more likely to hold pro- or anti-labour attitudes. Only on the instrumental dimension of union attitudes were we able to account for more than a fraction of the variation.

Our findings on the relationship between attitudes and propensity to unionize pose some useful working hypotheses for the future. One fruitful direction for research would be a more thorough analysis of the personal and structural factors which shape instrumental views towards unions, given their influence on propensity to join. An equally challenging question concerns how

union attitudes may shift in response to changing socio-economic conditions and, moreover, vary according to the broader class, ethnic and regional divisions in Canadian society. Ideally, future studies should attempt to utilize a longitudinal design with a representative national sample of the Canadian public in order to accurately monitor the patterns of change and variation in perceptions of unions.

Finally, what are the major implications of our findings for the Canadian labour movement? The ravages of prolonged recession and high unemployment have undoubtedly placed unions on a defensive footing. This is especially true in light of the layoffs, public sector wage guidelines, and employer demands for concessions which characterize the current industrial relations scene. Yet there can be little dispute that one of the keys to survival in the long-term is an offensive strategy based on public education and recruitment drives.

Those more likely to hold pro-union views, and therefore be predisposed to joining a union, are employed in the service industry and have recently experienced employment problems. Conversely, those least receptive to unionism are affiliated with the Progressive Conservative party, have higher than average education, live in Edmonton rather than Winnipeg and are married to a professional. These observations may simply confirm what union officials already know. On the other hand, it is valuable for unions to find out that solid public backing exists for any initiatives they may consider launching in the areas of occupational health and safety or industrial democracy. Rather than responding to public perceptions, or attempting to identify pockets of pro-union sentiments as the basis for organizational drives, it may be more effective for labour to directly influence public opinion. The growing research evidence that attitudes towards unions are the best predictor of union joining behaviour provides a solid rationale for such a strategy. Our findings

regarding the salience of the opposing big labour and business unionism images within the general population suggest a two-pronged educational program. Positive views of unions as effective vehicles for improving the wages and working conditions could be reinforced, while negative beliefs - such as unions causing inflation - could be combatted with factual information. When one considers the media's often uncritical acceptance of anti-union statements by businessman and politicians, concerted educational campaigns aimed at creating a more positive view of unions should be one of labour's top priorities.

FOOTNOTES

1. The American AFL-CIO has recently experienced its first decline in membership since 1955 (Le Louarn, 1979:73). Further, data from NLRB elections reveal that projected membership growth will not sustain current levels into the future (Sandver and Heneman, 1981). While Canadian membership may be still rising in absolute terms, there is some cause for concern given that union membership measured as a percentage of all paid workers declined from 33.2% in 1975 to 32.3% in 1980 (Labour Canada, 1983:12-13). Canadian union growth, in other words, is not keeping pace with labour force expansion.

2. The Gallup Poll question, "Do you approve or disapprove of trade unions?", received at least a 60% positive response whenever it was asked between 1936 and 1967.

3. Ponak and Haridas (1979) found that nurses in Wisconsin generally held more favourable attitudes towards unions than did their Ontario counterparts, even though only 10% were union members, compared to 70% of the Ontario nurses. They account for this finding by pointing out that Wisconsin nurses would probably be more highly unionized, were it not for the less favourable public policy climate in the U.S. which has discouraged collective bargaining among health care workers.

4. In Canada by 1980, 67.8% of the employees in Public administration were union members, and 3 of the 4 largest unions were in the public sector (Statistics Canada, 1982:60, 34).

5. Details of the York study are available from the Institute of Behavioural Research, Survey Research Centre, York University, Downsview, Ontario. Despite its age, the Uphoff-Dunnette scale of twenty items of "unionism in general" is still used by researchers (e.g. Gordon and Long, 1981). The scale has good validity and reliability, as reported by Uphoff and Dunnette (1956:12-17, 38). Robinson et. al. (1969) note its wide range of item content and careful construction.

6. The York Survey had a sample of 3287 respondents and over-represented the cities of Montreal and Toronto. We are reporting the unweighted results.

7. Total sample and separate Winnipeg and Edmonton sample factor analyses were performed, with relatively similar results (see Krahn and Lowe, 1982:28). Construction of a summary 13-item scale was considered, but its low reliability (Alpha = .51) and the results of these factor analyses suggested that the use of several scales and individual items was preferred. For both the "big labour" and "business unionism" scales, scores were averaged from a minimum of two of the possible items. This avoided the loss of too many cases due to list-wise deletion of those with missing data.

8. The separation of union and professional association members required us to make several classifying assumptions since 55 individuals stated that they were members of both. They were assigned to union or professional association categories on the basis of their industrial location and occupation. Labour force members include the unemployed.

9. These additional independent variables included: demographic measures (city of residence, age, binary measures for gender and marital status); status and income variables (years of education, total household income, a binary variable for home ownership); employment indicators (months employed in the previous year, total number of full-time jobs), three different global measures of job satisfaction, a question about employment problems (including unemployment, lay-offs, and other work-related difficulties); two measures of satisfaction with finances, and one with life in general; and a series of binary variables for political affiliation (PC, Liberal, NDP), for occupation (clerical, blue-collar), for industrial sector (services, finance and public administration, manufacturing/construction/transportation), and for spouse's work situation (a manager, a professional, a union member, in a blue-collar occupation, in a clerical occupation).

10. The multiple regression analyses reported in Table 7 use only three of the original seven attitude items and indices as dependent variables. An additional analysis (results not shown) compared the mean scores on all seven for non-unionized men and women in the labour force. Significant differences by gender were found for the right to refuse unsafe work and the workers on boards of directors items: in both cases, women were more pro-labour.

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